ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 16-A

THE DETROIT NEWS
4 September 1979

0291 GOP

Reforming the CIA

The Republican National Committee's proposals to strengthen the CIA deserve careful consideration.

Submitted in response to President Carter's new charter for the CIA, the GOP proposals address themselves primarily to the weakness of the intelligence services. But the GOP also wants a full and open debate of the new charter in Congress — something Democratic congressional leaders apparently wish to avoid.

There is no question that an extensive public debate is called for on a question of this importance. The argument that open hearings could reveal secrets bearing on national security won't wash, since nobody is suggesting that anything but the broadest policy matters should be discussed.

As for the Republicans' substantive proposals, they would do a good deal to bolster the quality of U.S. intelligence without threatening reasonable safeguards against abuse.

President Carter's plan would lump all the external intelligence agencies together. That means the information gathered by the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Treasury Department's intelligence unit, and the intelligence groups within the Energy Department and State Department would be collated with the CIA findings in one comprehensive report. While this sounds all right on paper, the Republicans point out that it would result in a detrimental homogenization or "filtering" of information. Because of their different missions, the various intelligence groups are apt to come up with different slants on a single topic or problem. This valuable diversity of opinion should continue be be available to the president.

The Republicans want to insulate the CIA from political influence and bias by requiring that almost all department posts be filled by professionals rather than political appointees. The dangers of politicization of the intelligence network are obvious and every effort should be made to remove the network from partisan influences.

The Republicans also would: Reestablish the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, an independent group reporting to the president; permit more extensive use of undercover agents posing as civilians; reduce the amount of CIA material that could be requested under the Freedom of Information and Privacy acts; and appoint a top-level adviser on intelligence affairs to act as a liason between the president and the various intelligence agencies.

The President's charter, while it does remove some of the more absurd restrictions on intelligence activities that have piled up during the post-Watergate era, retains too many of the restraints that have made competition with the Soviet Union's uninhibited KGB no contest.

The Carter plan also places too much emphasis on technological espionage through the use of satellites, aircraft reconnaisance, and electronic monitoring devices. These activities are undeniably important, but they are no substitute for field intelligence work, which can provide far more accurate assessments of local political conditions. Electronics alone could not have warned of the coming explosion in Iran, but an efficient intelligence force in Tehran might have provided some timely information.

One of the chief difficulties in dealing realistically with the U.S. intelligence problem is the almost comically negative image the CIA has for a great many people. Part of this image problem was the result of the agency's own well-chronicled excesses. But in their overreaction to these excesses, the CIA's critics have forgotten that a superior intelligence network played a large role in this nation's survival during World War II and after.

The intelligence agency should be empowered, with reasonable checks, to perform an indispensable mission. The Republican proposals are wisely directed toward that end.